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ABSTRACT

Researchers looked at participation in decision-making as perceived by 2,056 teachers, principals, central office personnel, and superintendents in Tennessee. They also looked at both satisfaction in relation to six decision categories and attitudes toward unionization. Teachers' self-perceptions of participation in policy decision-making generally were at lower levels than self-perceptions of principals and central office staff. Satisfaction with decision-making was moderately high for all respondents with principals indicating the highest satisfaction levels overall. All respondent groups indicated a moderate to high willingness to participate in collective action with teachers having the highest militancy levels. Correlations between satisfaction, participation, and militancy implied that there are ingredients other than participation in key decisions that affect teachers' satisfaction levels and willingness to unionize. Investigators visualize followup studies in the same school districts. Information on this issue may determine future action and strategy for teachers and managers. (Author)

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# Perceived Participation in Decision Making, Satisfaction, and Militancy of Teachers, Principals, and Central Office Staff in Tennessee Public School Districts

by

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# Perceived Participation in Decision Making, Satisfaction, and Militancy of Teachers, Principals, and Central Office Staff in Tennessee Public School Districts

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## Introduction

With the passage of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, and the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 came the opportunity for many employees across the country to organize and bargain collectively with their employers on such topics as wages, benefits, and working conditions. These federal statutes did not apply to employees in the public sector, and no nation-wide labor laws have been passed to date to include public sector employees. An executive order in 1962 by President John Kennedy, however, extended limited rights for federal employees to unionize. Many individual states have exercised their prerogative in this area (usually under pressure from employee groups) and have passed enabling legislation so that public employees can bargain. On March 10, 1978, such a law was passed by the legislature and signed into effect by the governor of Tennessee for the benefit of teachers (TCA, Sections 49-5501 through 49-5516). Thus, Tennessee became only the second Southern state (Florida is the other one) to enact a law allowing its teachers to vote to negotiate with their Boards of Education and requiring the boards to negotiate with the teachers. This event ushered in a new era for Tennessee in the area many educators, especially administrators, consider to be one of their greatest concerns. (Newby, p. 1 and Underwood, et al., pp. 23-24.)

The push by teachers' organizations across the state for negotiations with school boards is a trend that is evident in education nation-wide.

Teachers, more than any other professional group in America, are reported as having very little say in how they discharge their duties (Shanker, p. 23). The paternalistic nature of the educational organization has kept teachers in subservient roles. Professional teachers' organizations, however, have begun to seek greater influence on the factors that affect teachers' jobs. Many teachers have indicated greater interest in the decision-making process and have challenged the leadership of school administrators.

There are a variety of reasons influencing teachers' organizations to push for collective bargaining. Bailey lists the following factors as contributors to unionization and negotiations:

(1) Growth in size of the school bureaucracy reduces lines of communication;

(2) The job shortage in education makes it difficult for the dissatisfied teacher to switch employers;

(3) The teaching profession includes more and more primary wage earners;

(4) Taxpayers are resentful of increased school costs and demand evidence of results;

(5) The 1960's ushered in a climate of rebellion and a decline in respect for authority, making teachers' jobs more difficult (Bailey and Booth, p. 9).

Adams adds that the bureaucratic structure of education contributes to the alienation of teachers and that involvement in decision making is an effort on their part to reduce this sense of alienation (Adams, pp. 1-7).

Newby found tremendous support for the contention that collective bargaining has become an omnipresent force in education. Administrators are especially concerned about the time involved, the results produced, and the ever-changing balance of power created by collective bargaining (Newby, pp. 2-3).

The Problem

Tennessee, a traditionally conservative Southern state, was entering a new era in 1978-79. With the advent of collective bargaining (euphemistically termed "professional negotiations" by the local and state teachers' associations affiliated with the National Education Association) between teachers and boards of education, the potential for changes in the decision-making process within the educational establishment was obvious. The Tennessee law mandated negotiations in a number of areas including the nebulous area termed "working conditions," which when broadly interpreted can be construed to include almost any area in the operation of the schools. Decisions regarding such crucial areas as curriculum content and methods, financial priorities, selection and treatment of professional staff, student concerns, facility planning and maintenance, and school-community relations could all be included under the "working conditions" umbrella if it were liberally interpreted. At the same time it might be speculated that lack of input into some of these areas could lead teachers to be discontented and in fact lead them to opt to bargain collectively for participation.

Teacher associations pursue financial welfare items through the negotiations process, as other unions do; but they also pursue greater involvement into many areas of decision-making. The impact of the changing relationships is an important dimension for both those who advocate teacher involvement and those who advocate administrative prerogative protection to understand. How much, over time, do various decision areas become subject to cooperative, or at least joint, participation? Are there changes in the satisfaction with the decisions made under these new relationships? And if there are changes, is satisfaction greater or less for each of the participant groups? The answers to these questions are important to school administrators and to union leaders, as well as to management and organizational theorists.

Purpose of the Study

The focus of this study was to look at the participation in decision making of teachers, principals, central office personnel, and superintendents with their boards of education in six areas of organizational concern, as perceived by teachers, principals, and central office personnel. The study further investigated the level of satisfaction expressed by the three respondent groups with the decisions made in the six areas. The study was conducted in 16 East Tennessee school districts immediately prior to the implementation of a newly passed law which allowed for collective bargaining for the first time. Attitudes toward collective action were examined and compared to both the levels of participation and satisfaction with decisions in the six areas of concern.

Questions

The study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What were the perceptions in 16 East Tennessee school districts of each of the employee groups (teachers, principals and central office staff) of their own input in decisions made in six categories? The six categories of decisions were: (1) curriculum and instruction, (2) finance, (3) staff personnel, (4) student personnel, (5) facilities and (6) school/community relations.

2. What were the levels of satisfaction in the 16 school districts of the three respondent groups with the decisions made in each of the six categories?

3. How willing were respondents in each of the three groups to participate in collective action?

4. What relationships existed between:

   (a) each group's perceived participation in the six decision areas and their satisfaction with those decisions?

(b) each group's perceived participation in the six decision areas and their willingness to participate in collective action?

(c) each group's satisfaction with decisions in the six decision areas and their willingness to participate in collective action?

5. What differences existed among the perceptions of the various groups (teachers, principals and central office staffs) of the participation of the four hierarchical groups (teachers, principals, central office staffs and superintendents/boards) in the six policy areas studied?

Methodology

Data were collected using two questionnaires, "Critical Decisions Inventory" developed by Larry Peach (Perceptions of Participation in Decision Making and Satisfaction with Decisions Made in the Knox County School System, Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1978) and "Ostrander Collective Action Scale" developed by Kenneth Ostrander (A Study of the Scalability of Selected Attitude Items Related to Collective Action by Teachers, Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1968) in 16 school districts in East Tennessee. These data were collected shortly after the passage of a law requiring boards of education to negotiate with their teachers if the majority of the teachers desired, but before any of the districts had voted on collective representation. Both instruments utilized Likert-type response scales. The "Critical Decisions Inventory" included scales ranging from 1 to 9 for respondents to indicate the level of participation ("none" to "make decision") of each of the four decision-making groups and the level of satisfaction ("highly dissatisfied" to "highly satisfied") with decisions made in six categories. Five decisions were included in each of the six categories, resulting in 30 items for response. The "Ostrander Collective Action Scale" included a scale ranging from 1 to 5 on which respondents

indicated attitudes toward 33 aspects of unionization ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). Questionnaires were delivered and collected personally from school districts by project staff. Using a stratified random sample of 3083 subjects enabled the researchers to do analysis of data from each individual district. There were 2056 (66.7 per cent) questionnaires returned. Respondents were teachers, principals, and central office personnel. The school districts studied included two large urban districts (populations greater than 100,000), three medium-sized cities (populations 20,000-100,000), five small towns (populations less than 20,000), four medium-sized county systems (populations 20,000-100,000), and two small county systems (populations less than 20,000). This sample of school districts was comprised of the membership in an educational consortium in East Tennessee ranging geographically from Bristol, on the Tennessee-Virginia border on the north, to Chattanooga, on the Tennessee-Georgia boundary on the south. The average daily attendance (1978) ranged from 796 to 28,814. Teachers in five of the sixteen districts (two medium-sized cities and three small town districts) did not exercise their option to negotiate during the first two years of the law.

Data were analyzed for 16 districts together and for each district individually. Frequencies were analyzed to show the perceptions of participation, satisfaction, and militancy by employee group. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to relate each group's perceptions of participation to their levels of satisfaction and militancy. Finally, perceptions of the three respondent groups regarding level of participation of the four hierarchical decision-making groups were analyzed using ANOVA for each of the six categories of questions.

## Findings

Approximately two-thirds of the educators who were surveyed completed useable returns. The proportion of each group's returns were virtually identical--

66.9 per cent for teachers, 65.4 per cent for principals and 66.7 per cent for central office staff. The rate of returns ranged from a low of 27 per cent from one small town district to a high of 80 per cent from one of the medium-sized cities. Table 1 provides complete data on the return rates for the districts and for the three respondent groups in each district.

Teachers' self-perceptions of participation in policy decision making generally were at lower levels than self-perceptions of principals and central office staff (Tables 2 and 3). The levels of principals' self-perceptions of participation in policy decision-making were between those of teachers and central office staff. The policy areas in which respondents indicated the highest levels of participation were student personnel for teachers, student personnel and community relations for principals, and curriculum and instruction for central office staff. The policy areas in which respondents perceived themselves to participate least were staff personnel for teachers, finance for principals, and buildings/facilities for central office staff.

Respondents indicated a narrower range of levels for satisfaction with decision making than for participation in decision making (Tables 4 and 5). Satisfaction levels were given by each respondent group, regardless of who they perceived were the primary decision makers. In addition, there was congruity among the policy areas in which satisfaction levels were highest and lowest. All respondent groups revealed most satisfaction with decisions in community relations and least satisfaction with decisions concerning finance. The policy area of student personnel also was at the highest end of the satisfaction range for principals and central office staff, as was satisfaction with decisions regarding buildings and facilities for central office staff.

Review of the participation and satisfaction means in individual districts with more than one respondent showed that central office staffs in all districts

TABLE 1

Per cent of Useable Returns of Questionnaires on Decision Making and Attitudes Toward Collective Action in 16 East Tennessee School Districts, Spring 1978*

| District Number | % Teacher Return | % Principal Return | % Central Office Return | % TOTAL RETURN |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban (> 100,000) | | | | |
| 3 | 63.5 | 57.7 | 100.0 | 68.1 |
| 10 | 66.2 | 68.4 | 48.0 | 64.9 |
| Medium City (20,000 - 100,000) | | | | |
| 2** | 83.0 | 80.0 | 41.7 | 80.1 |
| 13 | 75.6 | 78.6 | 58.3 | 74.8 |
| 14** | 66.7 | 69.2 | 80.0 | 67.5 |
| Town ( < 20,000) | | | | |
| 5** | 23.8 | 50.0 | 100.0 | 26.7 |
| 8** | 75.6 | 100.0 | 85.7 | 77.7 |
| 9 | 64.7 | 100.0 | 80.0 | 67.9 |
| 12 | 71.4 | 25.0 | 66.7 | 69.2 |
| 15** | 69.2 | 66.7 | 100.0 | 70.8 |
| Medium County (20,000 - 100,000) | | | | |
| 1 | 74.8 | 75.0 | 50.0 | 72.8 |
| 6 | 71.7 | 38.8 | 85.7 | 69.0 |
| 7 | 75.8 | 64.0 | 50.0 | 73.3 |
| 17 | 70.1 | 70.6 | 62.5 | 69.8 |
| Small County ( < 20,000) | | | | |
| 4 | 46.8 | 54.6 | 41.7 | 46.9 |
| 16 | 35.2 | 46.2 | 90.0 | 39.9 |
| T o t a l | 66.9 | 65.4 | 66.7 | 66.7 |

*District 11 was used for instrument field testing and is not included.

**School districts which did not negotiate with their teachers, 1978-80.

TABLE 2

Mean Levels of Own Participation in Decision Making
As Perceived by Teachers, Principals, and Central Office Staff

| Respondents | POLICY AREAS | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Curriculum & Instruction | Finance | Staff Personnel | Student Personnel | Buildings/ Facilities | Community Relations |
| Teachers | 4.7 | 3.3 | 2.5 | 4.9 | 3.1 | 3.8 |
| Principals | 5.5 | 4.4 | 6.5 | 6.7 | 6.0 | 6.7 |
| Central Office | 6.9 | 6.3 | 6.8 | 6.7 | 6.2 | 6.8 |

Scale: 1 ——————→ 9
No Participation — Makes Decision

TABLE 3

Highest and Lowest Perceived Levels
of Own Participation in Decision Making (and Policy Area/s)

| | HIGHEST | | LOWEST | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respondents | Means | Policy Area/s | Means | Policy Area/s |
| Teachers | 4.9 | Student Personnel | 2.5 | Staff Personnel |
| Principals | 6.7 | Student Personnel<br>Community Relations | 4.4 | Finance |
| Central Office | 6.9 | Instruction | 6.2 | Buildings/Facilities |

Scale: 1 ⟶ 9
No Participation — Makes Decision

TABLE 4

Mean Levels of Satisfaction with Decision Making, Irrespective of Who Makes Decision, As Perceived by Teachers, Principals, and Central Office Staff

| | POLICY AREAS | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respondents | Curriculum & Instruction | Finance | Staff Personnel | Student Personnel | Buildings/ Facilities | Community Relations |
| Teachers | 5.4 | 4.4 | 4.7 | 5.7 | 5.4 | 5.7 |
| Principals | 6.4 | 5.1 | 6.0 | 6.7 | 6.4 | 6.8 |
| Central Office | 5.7 | 5.4 | 5.6 | 6.0 | 5.5 | 6.0 |

Scale: 1 → 9
1 Highly Dissatisfied
9 Highly Satisfied

TABLE 5

Highest and Lowest Levels of Satisfaction,
Irrespective of Who Makes Decisions (and Policy Area/s)

| | HIGHEST | | LOWEST | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respondents | Means | Policy Area/s | Means | Policy Area/s |
| Teachers | 5.7 | Community Relations | 4.4 | Finance |
| Principals | 6.8 | Community Relations<br>(Student Personnel=6.7) | 5.1 | Finance |
| Central Office | 6.6 | Community Relations<br>Student Personnel<br>(Buildings/Facilities=6.5) | 5.8 | Finance |

Scale: 1 ⟶ 9
1 Highly Dissatisfied
9 Highly Satisfied

had mean scores above 4.0, with most of the means being higher than 5.0. This finding was true for principals, except for participation and satisfaction in the policy area of finance. The only districts in which principals' participation and satisfaction scores were above 5.0 in all policy areas were city (not county) school districts (Districts 8, 13, and 14 in Table 1).

In contrast to the responses of central office staff and principals, teachers' participation and satisfaction means in the area of finance were 3.3 and 4.4 respectively. There were no districts in which teachers' perceived their participation in decision making in the area of finance to be higher than 5.0, and the means were as high as 4.0 in only four of the sixteen districts. While the teachers appeared to have higher means on satisfaction than participation in the area of finance, only three of the districts had means as high as 5.0 (Districts 2, 5, and 8--one medium city and two small towns, all non-negotiating). A similar situation was found in teachers' participation and satisfaction in the policy area of staff personnel, but the participation means were even lower in this area than were means for finance in all districts. Satisfaction means in the staff personnel area were comparable to the satisfaction means for finance in the individual districts, although the two other medium cities (Districts 13 and 14) joined the three districts mentioned above in this category. Of these five only District 13 was negotiating with its teachers in 1978-80.

Still different patterns were found for teachers' responses in the areas of buildings/facilities and community relations. In both of these policy areas there were no districts in which teachers perceived their levels of participation to be above 5.0. Their satisfaction with decisions in both of these areas, however, were above 5.0 in all but three districts (15, 16, 17) in the area of

buildings/facilities and in all districts in the community relations area. In every district except two (8 and 14), at least one participation or satisfaction level of teachers was below 3.0. Both of the districts with all levels above 3 voted to unionize after the implementation of the public negotiations bill in Tennessee. All respondent groups indicated a willingness to participate in collective action above the 3.0 mid-point on the militancy scale (Figure 1). The highest mean in any district for any respondent group was 3.7 (teachers in district 16--see Figure 2). Teachers had the highest militancy scores with a mean militancy score of 3.5. Teachers' militancy scores averaged above 3.0 in all of the 16 school districts.

Principals were the second most willing group to participate in collective bargaining. The mean militancy score for all principals was 3.1. Principals' mean scores on militancy were above 3.0 in more than half of the 16 districts. In all but one of these districts, collective bargaining subsequently was implemented.

Central office personnel were the least willing to participate in collective bargaining and had a mean of 3.0 on the militancy scale. The means ranged from 2.3 to 3.5 and were below 3.0 in more than half of the 16 districts.

In all districts except one, teachers' participation in decision making was positively correlated with satisfaction with decision making in all policy areas. There were significant positive correlations between participation of central office personnel and satisfaction with decision making in all policy areas, except curriculum and instruction and staff personnel. (See Table 6.)

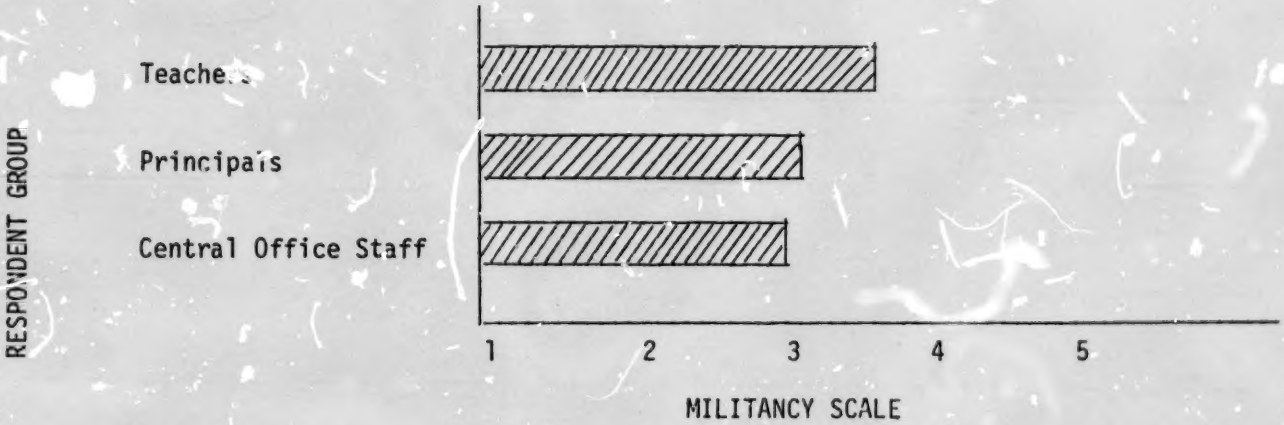


Figure 1. Mean Scores on Militancy Scale

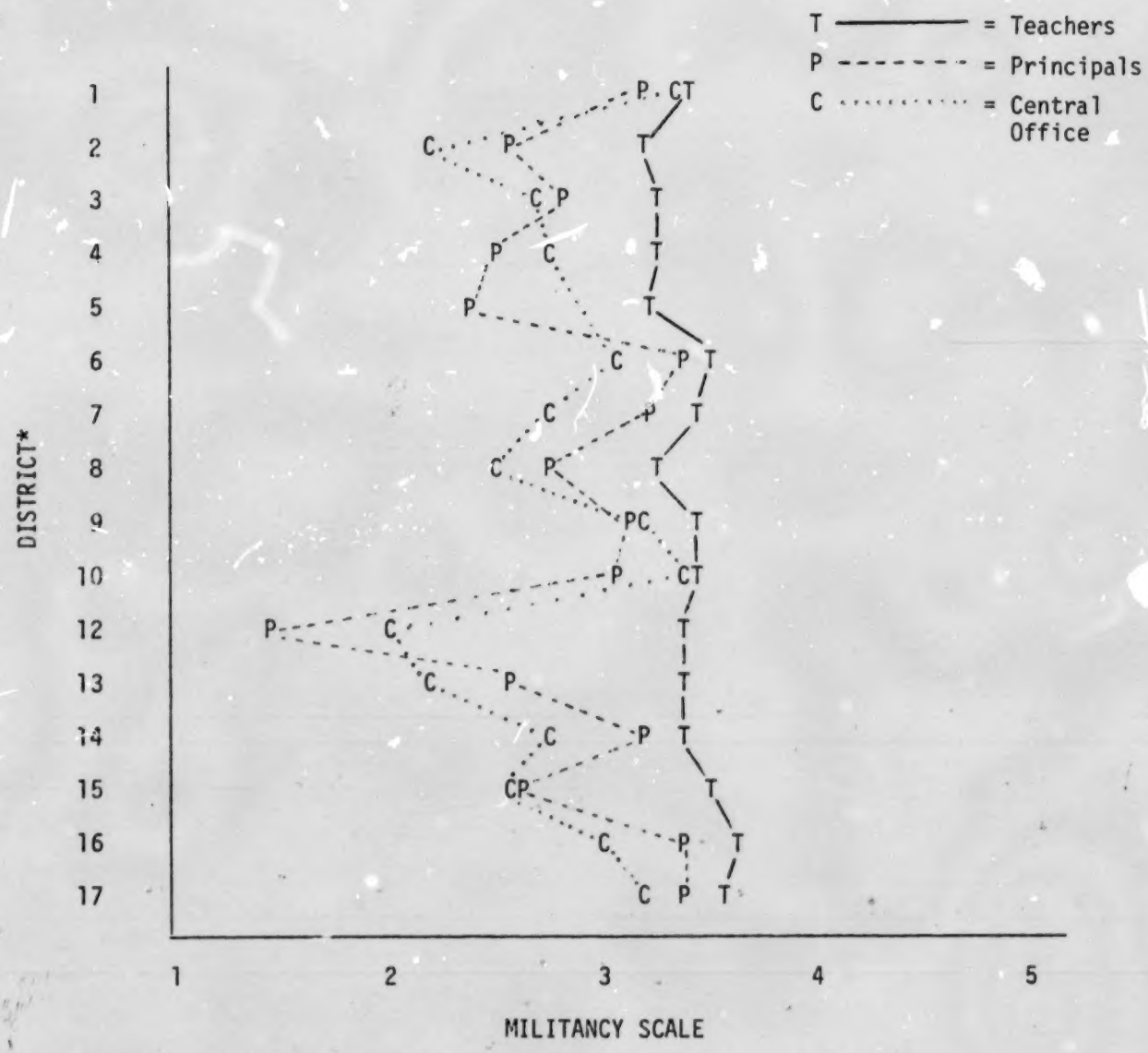


Figure 2. Militancy by School District

*District 11 was used for instrument field testing and is not included.

There were significant negative correlations between militancy and all participation and satisfaction variables for teachers (Table 7; Table 8). This pattern was true for principals, except for the correlations between participation in decisions regarding instruction and militancy and between participation in decisions regarding community relations and militancy. For central office personnel, there were significant negative correlations between militancy and satisfaction with decisions in all policy areas, but there were no significant correlations between militancy and participation in decision making. There were very few significant correlations shown between variables for central office personnel in individual districts.

When a repeated measures analysis of variance was run on the data using individual, evaluating group (teacher, principal and central office staff), and evaluated group (teacher, principal, central office staff and superintendent/board of education) as the sources of evaluation, with the six types of decisions (curriculum and instruction, finance, staff personnel, student personnel, facilities and school/community relations) as dependent variables, all main effects and interactions were found to be significant.

Discussion

Teachers universally rated their participation in decisions in the six policy areas as low to mediocre in all systems. Satisfaction was, on the other hand, consistently higher on the same scale (1-9) than was participation for each decision area in all school districts. This seems to imply that there are ingredients other than participation in key decisions which affect teachers' satisfaction levels. No systems, even the ones with the least participation and lowest satisfaction, were much above "neutral" on the militancy scale. Yet, eleven of the sixteen systems included in the study voted to bargain collectively

TABLE 6

Significant Positive Correlations (*) Between
Participation and Satisfaction Variables

| | POLICY AREAS | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respondents | Curriculum & Instruction | Finance | Staff Personnel | Student Personnel | Buildings/ Facilities | Community Relations |
| Teachers | * | * | * | * | * | * |
| Principals | * | * | * | * | * | * |
| Central Office | | * | | * | * | * |

TABLE 7

Significant Negative Correlations (-*) Between
Participation Variables and Militancy

| | POLICY AREAS | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respondents | Curriculum & Instruction | Finance | Staff Personnel | Student Personnel | Buildings/ Facilities | Community Relations |
| Teachers | -* | -* | -* | -* | -* | -* |
| Principals | | -* | -* | -* | -* | |
| Central Office | | | | | | |

TABLE 8

Significant Negative Correlations (-*) Between
Satisfaction and Militancy

| | POLICY AREAS | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respondents | Curriculum & Instruction | Finance | Staff Personnel | Student Personnel | Buildings/ Facilities | Community Relations |
| Teachers | -* | -* | -* | -* | -* | -* |
| Principals | -* | -* | -* | -* | -* | -* |
| Central Office | -* | -* | -* | -* | -* | -* |

at their first opportunity under the provisions of Tennessee's newly passed professional negotiations law. It must be noted that the non-negotiating systems ranged from 3.338 to 3.539 on a 1 (low militancy) to 5 (high militancy) scale. Although over all groups combined, there were significant correlations in the expected direction (i.e., negatively) between perceived levels of participation and willingness to participate in collective action, a number of the individual districts did not experience this relationship. The picture was mixed when comparing the negotiating and non-negotiating districts on this dimension; some of each group had significant relationships and some in each group did not.

A careful examination of other characteristics of the non-negotiating districts suggests some other intervening variables which may have affected the teachers' decisions not to pursue collective action at the present time. Each of the non-negotiating districts was a special city district in a small to medium-sized city (less than 100,000 population--in fact the largest was under 30,000). Some of the negotiating districts were small also and three were city districts of similar size, but both the large districts (over 100,000 population) and all the county districts had opted for negotiations.

In most Tennessee county school systems the superintendent is either elected to office by the people or by the local county governing body (not the board of education); whereas, in most special city districts superintendents are employed by their boards of education which are elected by the people. In the sample of school districts studied here, these patterns of selection held true except for one county district (district 1), where within the past five years the board of education has selected the superintendent.

Perhaps more pertinent to this discussion than how the chief school official was selected are the qualifications and characteristics of the

superintendents in the non-negotiating systems. All the superintendents in the systems involved were well-trained and professionally aware. The fact that their districts participated in the educational research consortium from which the sample came is evidence of this fact. However, the five superintendents of the non-negotiating systems may be worthy of further scrutiny. Three of the five had doctorates and the other two had had advanced training short of the doctorate. All were highly respected by their teachers and other staff; they were perceived as being educators first, politicians second. In one case a superintendent of long tenure and high respect was in his last year before retirement. In another case an assistant superintendent had recently been promoted to superintendent. The other three were leaders of long tenure who appear to have a long history of humane administration. As indicated earlier the systems were in small communities where the superintendent can and does know the teachers personally. It was reported from one district that the teachers asked the superintendent if he would be their negotiator with the board. When he explained the situation which under the law would put him on the board's team, the teachers voted overwhelmingly against bargaining.

## Future Directions

One benefit of this study is that data are now available for use as baseline information for further study. The investigators visualize follow-up studies in the same school districts, possibly after two, five, and ten years. In addition, proposals are being discussed to study decision making and unionization in other school districts and at different levels of the education system (e.g., community colleges and universities). Legislative and judicial decisions affecting eligibility of public and private education employees will be an important consideration in determining future directions for research.

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